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ABSTRACT

The current trend toward collaboration is having an impact on the fields of adult basic education and adult English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) and literacy education. This digest looks at collaboration for adult ESL programs and for family bilingual and ESL literacy programs. It discusses the distinctions among cooperation, coordination, and collaboration; presents a framework for collaboration; reports on uses of technology for collaboration; and explores ethical considerations, evaluation concerns, and policy issues. Each of these areas is examined in turn, and it is concluded that: collaborative efforts can offer better services than individual agencies can offer separately; the democratic nature of collaboration should benefit all participants--while providing the best services to clients. An inset briefly notes two successful collaborations in New Mexico, one urban and one rural. (Contains 10 references.) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on ESL Literacy Education) (LR)

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National Clearinghouse on Literacy Education

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National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education

Collaboration in Adult ESL and Family Literacy Education

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The current trend toward *collaboration* is having an impact on the fields of adult basic education (ABE) and adult English as a second language (ESL) and literacy education. Policymakers, attracted by the logic of inclusive, family-oriented services, have legislated collaboration into various programs for children and their families. Even Start, a family literacy program, and Follow Through, a program for kindergarten through grade three, require partnership among all service providers—federal agencies, adult and elementary educational institutions, teachers, and parents. Similarly, a federally-funded program for adults, the National Workplace Literacy Program, requires its projects to demonstrate a partnership between educators and business or labor organizations in providing basic skills education at the workplace.

This digest looks at collaboration for adult ESL programs and for family bilingual and ESL literacy programs. It discusses the distinctions among cooperation, coordination, and collaboration; presents a framework for collaboration; reports on uses of technology for collaboration; and explores ethical considerations, evaluation concerns, and policy issues.

Distinct Nature of Collaboration

How is collaboration different from traditional service delivery for language minority adults, in which one agency provides the language instruction, another provides job placement, and another provides counseling services? Is there collaboration whenever two or more agencies share information for and about clients and refer the clients to other agencies for needed services?

Writers on collaboration (Kagan, 1991; Winer & Ray, 1994) often make the following distinctions among cooperation, coordination, and collaboration.

• *Cooperation*–Each group retains its own authority and keeps its own resources. Cooperation can take place among groups with differing goals and without a clearly defined shared mission. There is little risk in this relationship and little gain, as there is no real sharing of goods, services, and expertise.

• *Coordination*–Each group retains its individual authority and independence, but specific modifications in the way it operates may begin to occur. Coordination requires mutual planning and open communication among groups as mission and goals begin to be shared. Partners enjoy the benefits of shared resources, yet power may become an issue among participating groups.

• *Collaboration*–Separate groups with commitment to a common mission come together to form a new structure. Collaboration requires comprehensive planning as decision-making, power, authority, and resources are shared. These synergistic efforts often result in innovations that benefit all participants: clients, service providers, and the wider community. In true collaboration, partners no longer run parallel programs at a common site, but have created a new program that offers participants more than the individual agencies can offer separately (Dilworth, in press).

A Framework for Collaboration

Although research indicates that there is no one way to collaborate, resource books share successful strategies, provide guidelines and suggestions, illustrate with examples, and warn of potential barriers or predictable pitfalls (Dilworth, in press; Kagan, 1991; Melaville, Blank, & Asayesh, 1993; Uhl & Squires, 1994; Winer & Ray, 1994).

One framework (Winer & Ray, 1994) helps potential partners to think about the collaborative process as a *series of changes in interactions* among individuals and the organizations they represent, rather than as a *set of sequential steps*.

• *Envision Results by Working Individual-to-Individual*
Individuals representing the collaborating groups meet to confirm their shared vision and specify desired results.

• *Empower Oneself by Working Individual-to-Organization*
Clear authority provided by both the home organization and the collaboration empowers individuals to act. This process entails confirming organizational roles, resolving conflicts, organizing efforts, and supporting members.

• *Ensure Success by Working Organization-to-Organization*
Envisioned services are provided and articulated goals are realized as the collaborative learns to manage the work, create joint systems, evaluate the results, and renew its efforts toward achieving desired results.

•*Equip for Continuity by Working Collaboration-to-Community*
The completion of the original collaboration often becomes the genesis of a new, more comprehensive collaboration as collaborators establish continuity for their successes by extending their relationships and responsibilities to include the broader community.

Utilizing Technology

Technology is making collaboration possible beyond the physical limits of traditional work environments and geographical locations. Teleconferencing facilitates information sharing by enabling individuals to communicate across the boundaries of time and space by telephone, television, or computer. Technologies are now available to take educators beyond teleconferencing by providing online forums for interactive meetings anywhere in the world. State-of-the-art collaboration technology is exemplified by Xerox's LiveBoard (Smart, 1993), an electronic blackboard that utilizes computer video technology. LiveBoard operates via ordinary phone lines and allows collaborators in single or multiple locations to share a common writing and viewing surface for capturing ideas; organizing information; and viewing, editing, and annotating documents.

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Ethical Considerations

Ethical questions arise in collaboration. Since collaboration involves shared power and decision-making, what ethical basis will individuals representing diverse groups use to make decisions? How will individual rights and group interests be preserved in the face of new organizational structures? Griesel (1992) offers collaborators a series of tools (including checklists, paradigms, and more sophisticated models) for use in examining ethical considerations. Her ten-point ethical guidelines for collaboration include questions about personal, professional, and public responsibility.

Evaluating Collaboration

Methods for evaluating collaboration are being developed. Most of these focus on process variables to help collaborators gauge their progress. A fundamental question for any partnership assessing its effort is, "Does our work meet the 'shared decision-making' criterion for true collaboration?" Schlessman-Frost and Saunders (1993) have developed a model to organize and clarify information to answer that fundamental question. This model provides a framework for determining the degree of collaboration in a partnership by classifying each collaborator's contributing activities as cooperation, coordination, and collaboration.

Owsley County Schools in the Booneville, Kentucky area used this model to articulate their informal knowledge about efforts in their Appalachian community to offer seamless education and social services from birth to adulthood, utilizing various federal and state funding sources. As they described it, "[you] can't see where one program ends and the other begins" (Schlessman-Frost & Saunders, 1993, p. 13).The model enabled Owsley County to organize and document information about its collaboration and to make its process one that can be duplicated in other communities.

Policy Implications

Trends toward collaboration raise policy and advocacy issues within adult ESL education. Funding agencies' definitions of family could contain subtle (or more blatant) biases. If a family must include children in order to qualify for services, the inclusive intent of integrated, comprehensive services may be contradicted, as childless adults are denied access to these services. A collaborative group might address such a policy issue in two ways. First, the group could work with the community, the collaborating partners, and potential participants to coordinate advocacy efforts for policy changes. Second, instead of waiting for the rules to change, the existing collaborative group could use its effective intra- or inter-organizational structure to combine resources in innovative ways to make services available for those who might be excluded.

Collaboration at the state level among ABE programs, including special education, bilingual and ESL education, and alternative secondary and GED instruction, could produce innovative services to meet the diverse needs of adults. Perhaps advocacy for mandated collaboration for ESL literacy in the Vocational and Adult Education Acts and in other legislation which provides instructional and social services to adults is worth considering.

Conclusion

Collaborative efforts can benefit all participants and stakeholders as programs created through collaboration often offer better services than the individual agencies can offer separately. The challenge to collaboration in adult ESL literacy instruction is to develop processes that are sharable, ethically conducted, and supported by 21st century technology. The democratic nature of collaboration should ensure that policies regarding collaboration are equitable and support the enlightened self-interest of all participants, while providing the best services to clients.

Two Successful Collaborations

The nature of collaborations varies depending on the resources and needs of the communities involved. Two of New Mexico's Even Start family literacy programs provide an illustration of this diversity.

An urban demonstration model in Albuquerque, PArents, Children, Community Togetner (PACCT), is run by an interagency project coordination team (Goldstein & Schlessman-Frost, 1992). Representatives from more than a dozen agencies including the public schools, community colleges, volunteer literacy programs, and early childhood service providers comprise this decision-making core group of collaborators who meet once a month to facilitate the collaboration process for all agencies, services, and locations in PACCT.

Another New Mexico collaborative effort, the Parents Are Teachers (PAT) project of the Pecos Valley Cooperative of Artesia, has modified PACCT's management structure for its rural setting. PAT collaborates with several ABE providers through area university branches to provide adult ESL and GED instruction to five communities, Loving, Dexter, Hagerman, Lake Arthur, and Artesia. Although linked by geographical proximity and central program administration, each town and population has distinct characteristics and needs. Therefore, PAT has established a collaborative leadership group in *each* community instead of operating under the leadership of one central location, as in the PACCT model.

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